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C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 001099

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/20/2008
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SUBJECT: "TELL THEM TO BE MORE CAREFUL:" IRAQ ANNOUNCEMENT
RUFFLES SINGAPORE'S FEATHERS

CLASSIFIED BY: AMB. FRANK LAVIN FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) MFA PERMSEC (2) BILAHARI KAUSIKAN, PLAINLY IRRITATED, CALLED DCM AT OOB ON MARCH 20 TO EXPRESS THE MFA'S CONCERN AT MISCHARACTERIZATION OF SINGAPORE'S POSITION DURING THE STATE DEPARTMENT'S MARCH 19 PRESS BRIEFING. SINGAPORE DID NOT APPRECIATE, HE SAID, PRESS REPORTS IMPLYING THAT IT HAD CHANGED ITS STANCE ON MEMBERSHIP IN THE IRAQ COALITION. THESE RESULTED FROM THE SPOKESMAN'S STATEMENT THAT "THERE IS SINGAPORE, THERE IS PORTUGAL, ALL OF WHOM SAID IN THE LAST 24 HOURS IT IS OKAY TO NAME THEM," RESULTING IN AN AFP REPORT THAT THE THREE NEWLY LISTED COUNTRIES HAD "PREFERRED TO KEEP THEIR SUPPORT ANONYMOUS."

12. (C) THAT WASN'T THE CASE, KAUSIKAN REMONSTRATED. SINGAPORE HAD ALWAYS MADE CLEAR ITS SUPPORT FOR THE EFFORT TO DISARM SADDAM, AND HAD NEVER SAID TO THE U.S. THAT IT DID NOT WANT TO BE MENTIONED. (APPARENTLY, SINGAPORE HAD BEEN CONCERNED NOT TO BE LISTED UNDER THE TITLE "COALITION OF THE WILLING," BUT WAS HAPPY WITH THE NOMENCLATURE THAT WAS FINALLY ADOPTED.) THE SNAFU WAS EMBARRASSING TO A GOVERNMENT WHICH HAD GONE OUT OF ITS WAY TO BE STEADFAST IN ITS POLICY ON IRAQ; HE BELIEVED IT RESULTED FROM LACK OF COORDINATION WITHIN THE USG. HE INSISTED THAT HIS DEMARCHE BE REPORTED TO WASHINGTON. (DCM OF COURSE AGREED TO DO SO, BUT HAS EDITED OUT THE INFLAMMATORY LANGUAGE.)

13. (C) AFTER CONSULTING THE BRIEFING TRANSCRIPT, THE DCM NOTED THAT A LARGE PART OF THE PROBLEM SEEMED TO LIE WITH AFP'S EMBROIDERY OF THE SPOKESMAN'S WORDS. HE ASSURED THE PERMSEC THAT ANY MISREPRESENTATION OF SINGAPORE'S POSITION WAS TOTALLY INADVERTENT. KAUSIKAN, MOLLIFIED, EMPHASIZED THAT HE WAS NOT ASKING FOR ANYTHING NEW OR DIFFERENT TO BE ENUNCIATED BY THE USG ON THIS ISSUE AT THIS TIME. "JUST TELL THEM TO BE MORE CAREFUL."

14. (C) COMMENT: WE SUSPECT THAT THE MFA RECEIVED SOME HEAT FROM THE GOS' SENIOR LEADERSHIP OVER THE PRESS COVERAGE, AND KAUSIKAN WAS FEELING THAT HEAT. THE QUESTION OF WHETHER SINGAPORE HAS BEEN "FORTHRIGHT" IN ITS SUPPORT FOR WAR IN IRAQ IS A POLITICALLY-CHARGED ONE DOMESTICALLY, AS GOS CRITICS HAVE LAMBASTED IT FOR "HIDING" ITS SUBSERVIENCE TO THE U.S. BEHIND A WALL OF OBFUSCATION UNTIL LAST FRIDAY.

LAVIN